



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Trimming the Fat

Prevalence of Abnormal Lipid Levels Among Youths — United States, 1999–2006

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[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes. High cholesterol isn't just for adults anymore. A recent CDC study found that one in five kids aged 12-19 years in the U.S. had abnormal lipid levels in their blood, which might indicate cholesterol problems.

Dr. Ashleigh May is an EIS officer with CDC's Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention. She's joining us today to discuss the importance of controlling cholesterol levels. Welcome to the show, Ashleigh.

[Dr. May] Thank you for having me.

[Dr. Gaynes] Ashleigh, what causes high cholesterol?

[Dr. May] For some individuals there's a family history of high cholesterol. But for many Americans an unhealthy diet, which includes high cholesterol and high fat, is a major contributor for high cholesterol levels.

[Dr. Gaynes] Why is high cholesterol a problem?

[Dr. May] Well, we all have cholesterol. Cholesterol contributes to normal bodily functions; however, it's excess cholesterol that's a problem. Excess cholesterol can build up in the arteries and lead to heart disease as well as other negative health consequences such as heart attack and stroke. Typically, we don't see heart disease and these related conditions until adulthood but the risk factors for heart disease may emerge during childhood and adolescence and this includes abnormal cholesterol levels.

[Dr. Gaynes] Ashleigh, tell us a little more about the problem of high cholesterol in kids?

[Dr. May] In a recent report that we published we found that about 20 percent of American youth have at least one abnormal cholesterol level be it good cholesterol — which is the HDL, bad cholesterol — LDL, or high triglyceride levels — also a bad cholesterol, and the numbers are even more staggering for overweight and obese youth. Taken together, all of these things really suggest that for American youth abnormal cholesterol levels are a major public health problem especially if youth are overweight or obese.

[Dr. Gaynes] Are there any symptoms of high cholesterol?

[Dr. May] No, there aren't any symptoms; however, cholesterol levels can be checked by a health care provider using a blood test known as a lipid profile.

[Dr. Gaynes] At what age should people start getting their cholesterol checked?

[Dr. May] The American Academy of Pediatrics and other organizations recommend that youth should have their first cholesterol screening optimally by age two but no later than age ten if they have family history of high cholesterol, a family history of premature disease, an unknown family history, or if they have other risk factors for heart disease or stroke such as overweight or obesity.

[Dr. Gaynes] Besides medication, what are some strategies for controlling cholesterol?

[Dr. May] The first line of defense for youth would be to modify their lifestyles, and so physicians would recommend changes in diet such as lowering fat intake, increasing fruits and vegetables, increasing physical activity, as well as weight management.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about controlling cholesterol levels?

[Dr. May] Listeners can go to www.cdc.gov/cholesterol.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks Ashleigh. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Ashleigh May about controlling cholesterol levels.

Children who are overweight are especially at risk for developing health problems later in life related to high cholesterol. Remember to encourage your children to be physically active and to eat a low-fat diet with lots of fruits and vegetables. If your child is overweight, ask the doctor if cholesterol screening is needed.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.